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## Language regression in Nigeria

The case of Ishekiri

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# LANGUAGE REGRESSION IN NIGERIA: THE CASE OF *ISHEKIRI*

**Oti Frances AYENBI**

*La dominanza linguistica è una realtà che si impone sempre di più alle società multilingui e plurali. In Nigeria la dominanza dell'inglese e la preferenza per questa lingua hanno indotto presso certi gruppi un comportamento linguistico che lascia intravedere il declino delle lingue minoritarie. Questo articolo analizza il comportamento linguistico nella comunità parlante l'isekiri e la diminuzione delle comunicazioni in questa lingua, che ha ripercussioni dirette sul suo uso e sulle sue funzioni. Vengono, inoltre, esplorati gli atteggiamenti linguistici di una microsocietà all'interno d'una macrosocietà. Si studiano i motivi della preferenza per l'inglese e si presentano suggerimenti per stimolare i locutori ad utilizzare maggiormente le lingue indigene.*

*La dominance langagière est une réalité qui de plus en plus confronte les sociétés plurielles et multilingues. Au Nigeria, la dominance de, et la préférence pour l'anglais ont mené à une forme de comportement linguistique qui indiquent le déclin progressif des langues minoritaires. Cet article analyse le comportement langagier dans la communauté linguistique ishekiri et la diminution dans l'emploi et la fonction de la langue due au manque d'emploi et au déclin de la communication. Il explore l'attitude générale à l'emploi d'une langue dans une (macro) société mais utilisant une (micro) société comme étude de cas. Il met en exergue les raisons de la préférence de l'anglais face aux langues indigènes et émet des suggestions pour encourager les locuteurs à utiliser ces dernières pour éviter leur éventuelle attrition.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article examines the linguistic situation in Nigeria using the Ishekiri language as a case study. While analyzing the phenomenon of language decline, it highlights language contact, linguistic speech communities and their attitude towards indigenous and dominant languages. Factors responsible for the dwindling use of indigenous languages and preference for English language were also examined.

## GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION OF NIGERIA

The entity called Nigeria was a British colony; it came into being when in 1914, Lord Lugard, then colonial administrator, amalgamated the Southern and Northern protectorates of the British territory around the River Niger basin. Nigeria is located in West Africa between longitude 3° and 14° and latitude 4° and 14°. It has a landscape of about 923.768km<sup>2</sup>. It is surrounded by French-speaking countries: Republic of Benin to the South-West, Cameroon to the South-East, Republic of Tchad and the Mambila mountains to the

NIGERIA'S  
ECONOMIC  
SITUATION

North-East, Republic of Niger to the North-West and the Atlantic Ocean to the South. As the most populous black African country with a population according to the 2006 census of about 150,003,542 inhabitants, it is the 9<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world. Abuja is the federal capital and seat of government and administration. Lagos, the former capital, remains the economic or commercial capital. The country is officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria and is constituted of 36 States and the Federal capital territory, Abuja. It has 774 local government or municipal councils and runs a presidential system of government. For easy political administration, the country is divided into 6 geopolitical zones by the ruling party, the Nigeria Peoples Party (PDP). These are: North-East with major cities such as Maiduguri, Yola, Damaturu, Potiskum, Bauchi, Gombe; North-West with Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara as major cities, North-Central with cities such as, Makurdi, Minna, Jos, Lafia, Lokoja (the first colonial capital after the amalgamation of the North and South by Lord Lugard in 1914), South-East cities of Owerri, Onitsha, Aba, Enugu, South-West cities of Lagos and Ibadan and South-South, also known as the Niger Delta Region, with two major oil producing cities at Warri and Port Harcourt, which plays host to most of the multinational oil companies in the country. Others cities in the region are Calabar, Uyo, Eket and Benin. It is worth mentioning here that, though this geographical demarcation has been accepted by Nigerians and has come to stay, it remains unconstitutional.

The fusion of Northern and Southern Nigeria has not ceased to produce conflict since 1914, as the North which is predominantly Muslim and the South which is predominantly Christian have not been able to constitute one entity without political and religious conflicts. Nigeria became independent on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960. The country was ruled by the Army for more than 35 years. Though now a democratic country practicing the presidential system of government on the United States of America model, the country is bedeviled by interethnic and religious crises as well as political and economic corruption.

Nigeria has an abundance of natural resources including crude oil which is its mainstay. According to information from emerging market focused investment banking firm *Renaissance Capital*, Nigeria is now the largest economy in Africa with \$405 billion. It is a consumer-based economy with a local population lacking technological skills. Though it has a large population and a huge market to lead the African continent, corruption among government officials and politi-

## THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF NIGERIA

cians including mismanagement, are the bane of the country. Security challenges remain an uphill task that needs to be tackled.

Nigeria plays the role of big brother in the West African sub-region where it poses as the major financier of the Regional Organization known as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with headquarters at Abuja. In spite of her wealth, the country remains poor with about 60% of the population living below the poverty line.

With about 250 ethnic groups and well over 450 languages, Nigeria is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country where diverse customs and cultures coexist. Its linguistic and cultural diversity contributes to her rich heritage. In Nigeria, people of an ethnic group are identified by the languages spoken in their community. For instance, the three largest ethnic groups which include Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo speak the Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo languages respectively. Other large groups and languages are Edo, Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik, Kanuri, Ebir, Nupe, and Tiv. The micro minority groups include Ishekiri, Urhobo, Idoma, Igala, Isoko, Fulani, the Ekweres, and many more which cannot be mentioned here. English is the language of administration, education, business and commerce, the press and international relations. Though not officially declared in the Nigerian constitution as the country's official language, English is the dominant language in Nigeria. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, the three major languages, are predominantly spoken and used as a means of communication in the regions where they are localized. Whereas Hausa is mainly used in the North, Yoruba in the West and Ibo in the East, Pidgin is used as a *lingua franca* in the South-South geopolitical zone in the Niger Delta Region. Though some forms of linguistic homogeneity exist in some parts of the North, West and East, there are a handful of heterogeneous linguistic groups in small, minority speech communities with a variety of dialects. This could be said to contribute to the inability of the country to design a National language policy. The fear of marginalization of the minority groups by the majority groups is mainly responsible. In the absence of a National language, English which is learned and spoken as a second language in the country, has had to assume the position of, and is accepted as the "unofficial official language" of Nigeria.

Thus, Nigeria does not have a language policy. The constitution nonetheless states that the National Assembly must conduct its affairs in English. The constitution also allows the use of indigenous languages in addition to English in the State houses of the Assembly. The introduction of regional indigenous languages in the State

THE ISHEKIRI  
LANGUAGE, THE  
LINGUISTIC  
SITUATION OF THE  
COMMUNITY AND  
RECENT EVENTS

Houses of Assembly became necessary particularly in the North where Hausa is spoken by well over one quarter of the Nigerian population as a first language.

The Nigerian language community is diverse and complex. It is a mixed population where people of different ethnic groups, tribes and tongues coexist and live in the same community, especially in the urban areas. In the rural areas, people live in small groups and speak the same language and are essentially homogenous culturally and linguistically. The reverse is the case in urban centres; communities are linguistically heterogeneous and complex, with members speaking different languages. This is responsible for the use of English and Pidgin as a means of communication. In spite of diverse languages and cultures, there exist interethnic or mixed marriages; also, people of different ethnic groups who speak different languages work in the same office. Children of different tribes and tongues are in the same class. The only means of communication or common language is English or Pidgin. Due to the inability to understand one another, people hardly use their indigenous languages. The role of English as a dominant language to a large extent could be said to be one of the causes of language regression in Nigeria. Nigerians do not only prefer English to their domestic languages, they believe that the latter are limited in scope and usefulness. In his article "Attitude to foreign languages and indigenous language use in Nigeria" (2001) Oluwole Oyetade argues that "the extent to which one language or type of language is favoured or preferred depends on the community's perception of the role or status of that language or language type in the context of the prevailing linguistic attitudes in the society".

The spate of religious and ethnic crises in some parts of the country, as well as religious bigotry and ethnic cleansing which has led to disharmony and disintegration, could account for a change in communication patterns. Where people are continuously fleeing from one part of the country to another, the tendency will be to adopt and acquire new speech acts. The migration of people from crisis-ridden areas to places with relative security gives rise to a dwindling speech population. The influx of people from rural to urban areas could be responsible for reduction in the use of a language. The scenario painted above is also true of the Ishekiri language.

The Ishekiri language belongs to the linguistic family of the Niger-Congo language group. It bears the same name as the ethnic group. The Ishekiris are a small ethnic group numbering about one million people according to the 2006 census. They are found in the coastal states along the Benin River and the "Escravos bay" in the mangrove swamp around the Atlantic Ocean in Delta State in the Niger Delta

Region, South of Nigeria.

Their neighbours are the Edo-speaking Binis, and the Ijohs (Ijaw) along the sandy beaches of the Bight of Benin, as well as the Urhobos in the hinterland. Though linguistically and culturally different, the Ishekiris, the Urhobos and Ijohs are economically interdependent.

The Ishekiris dominate government structures in the three local government councils of Warri South, Warri South-West and Warri North. Warri and Sapele, two major commercial centres in Delta State are situated on the Ishekiri landscape. Endowed with large deposits of crude oil, vast economic growth as a result of the existence of several multinational oil corporations, the Ishekiri Community attract people of diverse linguistic background who move into Warri city from neighbouring states, towns and villages in search of greener pastures. A key Multinational Oil Company in Nigeria, Chevron Nigeria Limited, owns the Escravos Gas to Liquid Project (EGTL), the second largest gas project in the world. Until recently, Warri, also known as the “oil city used to be host to many Multinational Oil Corporations and oil servicing companies including Shell Petroleum, Total Fina Elf, TEXACO overseas, Schlumberger, etc. The influx of people from various ethnic groups with diverse linguistic backgrounds to the Ishekiri community brought about mutilations in the Ishekiri speech act and discourse. Ethnic groups such as Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko exist side by side with the Ishekiris in Warri and Sapele. The presence of these neighbouring ethnic groups with diverse languages has in no small measure affected the linguistic pattern and behaviour of the Ishekiri speech Community. Linguistic contact among these groups has led to a change in the linguistic behavior of members of the groups including the Ishekiris. In examining the phenomenon of language regression, ethno linguists tend to first and foremost take a critical look at the vitality of the language in question. According to them, in characterizing a sociolinguistic situation, several factors are used in assessing language vitality or regression. One of them is intergenerational transmission. Joshua Fishman (1991) argues that “the commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next”. At the International Expert Meeting of the UNESCO program on Safeguarding Endangered Languages (Paris 2003), situations indicative of an endangered language were highlighted. One of such pointing to a situation of severely endangered language is where “a language is spoken by only grandparents and older generations, while the parent generation may still understand the language but do not speak it to their children and among themselves”. This situation typi-



cally describes the Ishekiri speakers and the speech community as we shall see later. The raging phenomenon is such that children and youth cannot express themselves in their parental and indigenous languages. When asked why he could not speak Ishekiri, Jojo, a youth, replied he was not taught by his parents.

The situation of the Ishekiri language can also be examined from the point of view of languages in contact and language conflict. Linguistically, Nigeria is characterized by diverse languages. Language diversity according to UNESCO depicts a rich cultural heritage that could be harnessed to benefit the people. Recent happenings, however, prove otherwise in Nigeria where members of minority speech communities engage in conflicts for fear of being marginalized by majority languages. Herbert Igboanusi and Isaac Ohia in Williams (1991) are of the opinion that “languages in contact are often languages in competition” and that “there is no language contact without language conflict”. Language conflict in Nigeria could be understood against the backdrop of numerous ethnic languages, all of which are in competition for supremacy and survival (Igboanusi 1990). While most of the minority languages continue to witness decline and regression, English language and Nigerian pidgin and major languages continue to enjoy increasing degrees of expansion (Igboanusi & Ohia Isaac 2001). The Ishekiri language is in contact with other neighbouring Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, Yoruba, Ibo and recently Hausa (as a result of religious killings in Northern Nigeria) languages. The contact between the Ishekiris and their neighbours has had a far-reaching effect in the continuous decline in use and function of Ishekiri. Also, the spate of wars in the oil rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, particularly in Delta State, the highest producer of crude oil in Nigeria has also adversely affected the Ishekiri language. The war between Ishekiri and Ijaw, then Ishekiri and Urhobo between 1997 and 2003, is a case in point. The war did not only lead to the death of a lot of people, it caused a major change in their linguistic patterns. For instance, people stopped speaking their indigenous languages because they were afraid of being attacked. As observed by Ojoro (all proper names are fictitious), during an interview conducted in the course of my research, “even as an Ishekiri person, when you speak the language to a fellow Ishekiri, he responds in English because, he/she does not want to be identified with the language”.

**WHAT IS RESPONSIBLE  
FOR THE NON-USE OF  
ISHEKIRI AS A MEANS  
OF COMMUNICATION?**

Some reasons for the non-use of the language have been highlighted above. However, more revelations are to be found in the extract of my interview with members of the Ishekiri speech community. Findings highlighted in the interview include: 1) the mixed population in the Ishekiri speech community. A major factor is the presence

of neighboring ethnic groups such as Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, Igbo and Edo speaking in the Warri metropolis. The coexistence of the Ishekiris with these tribes has far reaching consequences in their linguistic ecology and behavior; 2) due to mixed marriages, parents from different linguistic background do not speak their native language to their children. The result is that their children do not speak the indigenous language, they rather speak English or pidgin; 3) because of the cosmopolitan nature of Warri, Sapele and the environs, the existence of different languages spoken in the surroundings, and because people do not understand each other's language, Pidgin English is preferred as a means of communication. In effect, parents became used to speaking the common language understood by all and no longer speak their native language to their children. Pidgin English has become the vehicular language. According to another interviewee, Pidgin English is the *lingua franca* in the community, and the local trade language: "in Nigeria, it is the second language of the people. For example, when you want to buy something, what you hear is: "how much you dey sell am?" you want to take a cab/taxi, "where you dey go"? Pidgin English is developed particularly in Warri; the nerve centre of commerce and business in Delta State". You hardly hear people speak Ishekiri in Warri and Sapele, the two major cities of the Ishekiri ethnic group and the cradle of Pidgin English. Pidgin English is a substrate of some of the local languages in Delta State. New terms are developed in Warri daily. According to Agban, "some of the terms that the boys use are derived directly from the local languages". 4) a very important factor that could be attributed to the non-use of the language is insecurity arising from interethnic crises in Warri. According to Ojilo, "people are scared to speak Ishekiri for fear of being identified and attacked by an adversary. Parents instructed their children not to speak the language in public". The result is a decline in the number of users and speakers of Ishekiri.

#### WHAT LED TO THIS RESEARCH?

What warranted or informs this research is the observable behavior of speakers of Ishekiri who seem reluctant to speak it. As I relate with members of my immediate family, I realized that the language that was quick to come out of their mouth was either the standard English or what Nigerians call "good English" or "pidgin English" instead of Ishekiri. Observing my family members, for a period of time, I did not hear anyone of them speak a word of Ishekiri, not even amongst their friends who are also Ishekiri. This is also reflected in the community. Permit me to digress a bit. (I come from a densely populated area in Warri metropolis called Daudu (Alders town).



Here there are areas like Odion, Iyara, Bowen Avenue, Market road, and Pessu Market. My family home is at Market road. This area is predominantly Ishekiri speaking with some mix from other ethnic groups like Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, Igbo and Hausa. Walking on the street of market road, Odion, Iyara, or rather, in public transport, I was appalled by the language I heard the people speak. Everywhere I went, no one spoke his or her indigenous language; but Pidgin English. When I asked the reason for this I was told, it was because “the next door neighbour might just be a “non tribe” that is, one who does not speak the same language as you. The reason is that most people in the community come from diverse ethnic groups and speak different languages, and the only means of communication amongst them is Pidgin English.

Another reason attributed to this linguistic behavior is commercial. I was told that people trading in the market place are of diverse ethnic groups. Business transactions are in English or pidgin. In the tribunal, in schools, in churches, this is what abounds. The coexistence of different linguistic varieties and dialects underpins this linguistic speech behavior. In hospitals in Warri metropolis, even though you may find medical personnel who come from the Ishekiri stock, who under normal circumstance would communicate in the language, he/she may be forced to communicate in either good English or in Pidgin because his patient might come from a different linguistic entity. The above scenario is what informs my research on “Endangered languages” using Ishekiri language as a case study. I realized that people were ignorant and unconscious of their behavior towards the use of their language. If nothing is done to bring the people to the realization and consciousness of the situation, it might be disastrous in the near future. I then decided to embark on an exploratory study of the speech behavior of the people of my community with a view to not only drawing their attention to the reduction in the use of the language, but also come up with strategies and ways to attract children and young people to speak Ishekiri through enlightenment campaigns and creation of awareness. The ultimate goal is to propose interventions and advocacies with a view to preserving the language so it does not become extinct. According to sociolinguists and ethnologists, a language not transmitted is bound to become extinct.

What obtains in a micro society is sometimes a fall-off from the macro society. In Nigeria in general, the scenario painted above is a reflection of what obtains in the larger society. Nigeria is characteristically a multilingual and a pluralistic country with about 450 languages and 250 ethnic groups. English has become the dominant language and is gradually replacing indigenous languages. The status

## ADVENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

## SOME MIND-BOGGLING QUESTIONS

accorded to English in the Nigerian society is such that it is spoken in practically all homes in the South, the East and West of Nigeria. The rural communities in the North of Nigeria are still able to maintain the Hausa language as it is still being spoken and used in the countryside. In most big cities like Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Maiduguri Katsina and Zaria, Hausa is still being maintained in predominant Hausa enclaves, but English is spoken in areas known as ‘*Sabon Gar*’ (New town) where strangers who are mainly non Hausa-speaking are localized.

During the colonial administration, conscious of the linguistic diversity in the environment, the colonists decided to merge the North and South of Nigeria in 1914 - a phenomenon created a 100 years ago which has proved unfavourable to the Nigerian nation. Language diversity which could be developed and explored to the advantage of the country as in the case of Europe, has turned out to be a curse rather than a blessing as Nigerians have failed to accept each other. When the colonists realized the difficulty in governing and administering the country due to language barrier, they decided to impose their own language: English. The need was felt for people to have a common language to foster a good relationship and create a cordial atmosphere for a smooth running of the entity called Nigeria. As such, English was used in administration and governance. In academics, media, tribunals, judiciary, in the houses of Assembly, hospitals, churches, business and in all walks of life, English is the only means of communication amongst people who do not speak and understand the same language.

The role of English as a second language is such that, Nigerians hardly speak their indigenous languages, as English has become their *lingua franca*. This is what is responsible for parents’ “negative” attitude towards their own languages which they have failed to transmit to their children. Not only do parents prefer to communicate in English with their children as a social symbol, they believe the children will learn and understand better and more quickly too when they go to school if they have a grasp of English at home, since all subjects and disciplines are taught in English. Much as this thinking is true and evident in children who communicate fluently in English (such children actually do very well in their education, better than those who use pidgin and sometimes indigenous language), this attitude has led to such children “not having an identity”, and the question of what the child’s first language might be becomes an issue.

What are the chances of survival of the language?

Is the language condemned?

What does the future hold for the language and how can it be preserved?

What are the solutions?

Can it be said that the Ishekiri language is condemned? What are its chances of survival? Again, the results of the interview are quite revealing. A question pointing to the extinction of Ishekiri in the next 50 years received an alarming response from Abele. According to him, the “Ishekiri language may not even survive the next 50 years, given the rate at which we owners and speakers of the language are neglecting and abandoning it”. Bovi responded that “Ishekiri language users feel it is not important to speak it as other languages especially English language has taken its place in the society and that most parents do not speak it with their children at home”. Linguists argue that a language not transmitted during one generation risks extinction. One of the characteristics of language vitality is its transmission from one generation to another. Contrary to this, regression sets in. The issue of the loss of Ishekiri culture and identity according to a respondent is an indication of the seeming hopeless plight of Ishekiri. Another respondent, Mr Alawu is of the opinion that “the youths believe Ishekiri is not the official language in Nigeria therefore it is not important to speak it since it is neither used in Education nor administration and in the media”. When asked how often she speaks Ishekiri, Dude’s response is most disturbing: “it all depend on the occasion, when I’m with my spouse, I sometimes speak Ishekiri with him, especially when we are outside the home and with non Ishekiri friends. When I want to communicate certain secrets to him and we don’t want people to understand what we are saying, I speak Ishekiri”. This points to the fact that she does not speak Ishekiri always but occasionally when she wants to discuss an issue she considers secret. Ishekiri language is therefore used occasionally when the need arises. The speech community does not consider it obligatory and paramount to use the language in normal communication. The existence of neighboring languages in the Ishekiri community is an issue. The influx of non Ishekiri speakers to Warri has made it such that people speak English or pidgin to be able to communicate with each other. According to a respondent, Mr Ejogu, “Pidgin English is the only means by which we can communicate in the environment. So it has become part of us; we have become used to speaking it that when we want to communicate with our brothers and sisters, including our parents and their children, it comes naturally instead of Ishekiri”. Ishekiri seems increasingly threatened by the existence of other neighboring languages especially during the inter-ethnic war that lasted about 7 years. A war that had a devastating linguistic effect in the life of the people. A respondent, Mr Otio, has this to say “One could not speak Ishekiri because when you speak it

WHAT IS THE  
FUTURE OF THE  
ISHEKIRI  
LANGUAGE? WHAT  
DOES THE FUTURE  
HOLD?

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR  
PEOPLE TO UNITE  
TO PRESERVE  
THEIR LANGUAGE?

WHAT ARE THE  
SOLUTIONS?

you are in trouble. You don't want people to identify you with Ishekiri language. Even up till now, when people are in a gathering, and are asked where they come from, they pretend not to know how to speak the language. People are suspicious of each other. People are still living in fear".

Different opinions abound concerning the future and survival of the language. Some of those interviewed think that the survival of the language depends largely on the speakers. A good number think that as long as the language is not transmitted from one generation to another, the chances of survival are very slim, by implication, the language risks extinction. According to Okibe, "I think we are in a very serious situation now because the upcoming generations are not really learning how to read and write the language. Because of that, children from home where father and mother are both Ishekiri speak Pidgin English. Pidgin English has become more or less the *lingua franca* in the society particularly in Warri, Sapele and in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. It's not only Ishekiri; Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko are also suffering the same fate". The same scenario could be said of the entire country.

When asking what could be done to reverse the situation, we wanted to know if the teaching of Ishekiri in schools in the three Warri local government area councils could help. Mr Ogologo has this to say: "Well, that has been a tough one, a herculean task. Because of the influence of other neighboring languages, that has not been possible. The Nigerian policy in Education states that 'a child should be taught the language of first contact in the first 9 years of his life'. I don't know of anywhere in the country where that is implemented. Ishekiri is taught in Warri but as an optional subject because, firstly, there is a dearth of teachers of the language, secondly, many of the Ishekiri teachers are not interested in teaching the language. Thirdly, there is the local competition/rivalry amongst neighbouring ethnic groups. Ethnicity, tribalism and local politics are affecting the teaching of Ishekiri language".

Are there solutions in sight? What measure could be put in place to maintain the language? What could be done to safeguard it? Some people think that the destiny of the language lies with the speakers. According to some schools of thought, "if parents do not speak the language to their children, their children will not speak it to their own off spring, consequently, the language might go into extinction".

What remedy to protect and preserve the language? A common opinion among respondents to my interview is that parents should communicate with their children in the language, because, according to them, language acquisition starts at home and the environment especially through informal learning. Yet others suggest the necessity to organize seminars and conferences to awaken the speech community to the danger of ignoring and neglecting their language. Others are of the opinion that people should come to a round table discussion on the future of the language. A teacher of the language suggests that the teaching and learning of the language in primary and secondary schools is a very key strategy for its survival.

In addition, establishing socio cultural centers where children and youth can have extra-curricular activities may help to preserve the language. Other schools of thought are of the opinion that the language could be preserved and protected if people are encouraged to speak and use the language effectively. Scholarships should be provided to Ishekiri sons and daughters to train as teachers to teach the language. Adequate text books should be provided. Seminars, workshops, in-service training should be organized regularly. There is the need for adequate financial support to implement policy on Education. Both State and Local government ministries of Education should be involved. There should be youth and children's clubs, as well as youth organizations where cultural activities like storytelling, Ishekiri poems, rhymes, dramas, dances, folktales, will be organized. Moonlight plays and fables written in simple Ishekiri language should be introduced. Occasionally, important and qualified and capable Ishekiri personalities could be invited to deliver lectures on important subjects using Ishekiri language. Other measures to encourage children and youth to communicate in Ishekiri may include libraries stocked with Ishekiri language books, journals, and seminar papers in the language. Small groups of Ishekiri speakers of all ages could be organized and registered to perform live drama which could be showcased to entertain people in theatres. The language should be used in crèches and in early childhood centers. Youths could be encouraged to speak and address each other in the language in their social clubs. Members of the community must not only learn their oral literature and folklore, they must also learn to sing Ishekiri songs and dance to the tune of Ishekiri music. Ishekiri oral literature and folktales could be made into CDs for children and youths to watch. Forums where older Ishekiri men and women dressed in Ishekiri cultural attire are invited to showcase the Ishekiri language and culture to the young generation could be organised.

## CONCLUSION

In this write up, we dwelt on language regression in Nigeria using the



Ishekiri minority language in Delta State of Nigeria as a case study. We tried to examine the linguistic situation of the language pointing out reasons why the Ishekiri speech communities do not speak and use their language. Attitudes towards their own language, the chances of survival and preservation were analyzed. Finally, solutions not only to revitalize the language but also to maintain it were suggested. However, in the course of my research, results of the interviews carried out suggest that the Ishekiri language might be severely endangered going by criteria for evaluating language vitality. Findings highlight the need for prompt action to safeguard and protect the Ishekiri language. Some measures to maintain a language, as suggested at the Expert meeting of UNESCO for the safeguard of an endangered language include: provision of basic linguistic and pedagogical training; providing language teachers with training in basic linguistics, language teaching methods and techniques; curriculum development and teaching materials development; sustainable development in literacy and local documentation skills; training local language workers to develop orthographies if needed, and to read, write and analyze their own languages, and produce pedagogical materials. One of the effective strategies here is the establishment of local research centres, where speakers of endangered languages will be trained to study, document and archive their own language materials.

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